

Congressman Jim Kolbe

8th District Arizona

Newsletter

Issue 4 ♦ October 2005



Inside This Issue...

TUCSON SECTOR GETS \$56 MILLION

Great news for southern Arizona in the ongoing fight to protect our borders! Congressman Kolbe was able to secure \$56 million for the Tucson Sector of the Border Patrol for construction projects to keep our communities safe. The money is part of the Fiscal Year 2006 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Bill. Find out how Border Patrol plans to use this money.

Page 1

Medicare Rx Drug Program

Great news for Medicare beneficiaries! Starting on January 1, 2006, the new Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit will begin. But before that time, there are some things you need to know, and do, to make sure you can take advantage of the savings.

PAGES 4-5

Hurricane Response

When disaster struck, America, Congress, and southern Arizona responded. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita impacted everyone – no matter how far away we live from the Gulf Coast, and their effects will continue to be felt for a long time. Read about what the House of Representatives has done to provide relief and rebuild.

PAGES 2-3

IN EVERY ISSUE:

Contact Me

Have a question on legislation or my views? Coming to Washington, DC and want a tour? Need some help with a federal government office? Information on how to contact my office...

PAGE 6

Jim's Mailbag

Congressman Kolbe answers your concerns about education funding for our troops.

PAGE 8

Legislative Update

Besides passing legislation in response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Congress has been busy passing laws to improve the safety of children and increase our security at home.

PAGE 7

STRENGTHENING BORDER SECURITY

More Than \$56 Million to Tucson Sector

On October 4, 2005, I had the privilege to present Tucson Sector Border Patrol Acting Chief Ronald Colburn with a check for \$35 million. This money is essentially a blank check to Border Patrol – they can use the money at their discretion to either begin new construction projects or expedite existing ones.

In addition to the \$35 million, the Tucson Sector will receive their full funding request of \$21.2 million for construction, fencing, lighting, and other projects to help secure our borders. The \$21.2 million will be used for the following projects: \$10 million for a 120 agent Border Patrol Station in Willcox, \$2.7 million for a 150 agent Border Patrol Station in Sonoita, \$975 million for the Douglas Roadway Project, \$2 million for the Douglas Fencing Project, \$543,000 for the Naco Roadway Project, and \$5 million for the Tucson/Yuma Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge Vehicle Barrier.

This money is part of the Fiscal Year 2006 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, which was signed into law by the President on October 18, 2005. As a member of the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, and an appointed conferee on the

House-Senate Conference Committee, I fought hard to ensure not only Border Patrol, but the entire Department of Homeland Security is given ample resources to get the job of securing our homeland done.

I am proud of this bill – it includes everything DHS needs to keep us safe and continue their efforts to strengthen border security. The \$30.8 billion measure includes \$19.1 billion for border protection and immigration enforcement. That is a \$1.2 billion increase over FY '05.

For instance, the bill funds an additional 1,000 Border Patrol agents and 250 more Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agents. Combined with the Fiscal Year 2005 Supplemental, a total of 1,500 Border Patrol Agents and 568 ICE Agents will be added. The bill

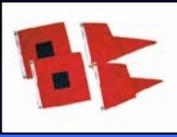
also includes \$41 million for increased border security technology such as surveillance and unmanned

aerial vehicles (UAV).

The legislation also focuses on air travel safety. It provides \$45 million for increased intelligence and targeting for cargo and passengers, \$2.5 billion for passenger and baggage screeners, \$443 million for explosive detection systems, and \$85 million for air cargo security, including 100 new inspectors.



Congressman Kolbe presents Acting Chief Border Patrol Agent Ronald Colburn with a check for \$35 million to continue protecting our borders.



HURRICANES KATRINA & RITA

The House of Representatives Response

Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast of the United States on August 29, 2005, causing widespread flooding and significant property and infrastructure damage to Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Hurricane Katrina was a national disaster. The process of rebuilding these families' lives and the cities and neighborhoods where they lived will take years of work.

In response to the widespread destruction brought to the Gulf Coast by Hurricane Katrina, Congress completed action on two separate emergency supplemental bills, which together provide \$62.3 billion for the immediate emergency response and recovery needs of the affected region. Of the combined amount provided in the two measures, \$60 billion is for the ongoing efforts of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to provide emergency food, shelter, and medical care to flooded regions; \$1.9 billion is for the Department of Defense to defray the cost of deploying military personnel to the region for

rescue and relief, and for other response costs; and \$400 million is for the Army Corps of Engineers to restore navigation waterways and repair damaged flood control projects in affected Gulf states.

When it comes to helping respond to humanitarian crises around the world, the American people have a tremendous record of helping others, such as during the recent tsunami. Americans have responded generously in this time of need in our own country. I am particularly proud of the people of southeastern Arizona, who did a tremendous job preparing to welcome evacuees from the affected area.

In Congress, dozens of bills have been introduced to assist in relief and recovery, rebuild the region, provide assistance to families, homes, and businesses, and investigate the government's preparation and response to this disaster. A list of some of the measures on which the House of Representatives has taken action to date is on the next page.

THE NEED FOR OVERSIGHT

As mentioned above, Congress has already appropriated more than \$60 billion to Hurricane relief efforts, and more money is expected. This is twice the annual budget for the Department of Homeland Security. While I support using federal funds to help pay for some of the reconstruction efforts, it is critical we account for the resources dedicated to hurricane spending. We must put into place controls to make sure this money is not wasted on government bureaucracy or frivolous projects.

To do this, I have introduced bipartisan legislation to create an independent Special Inspector General to oversee funding related to Hurricane Katrina relief efforts (HR 3737). It is imperative we put in place controls to make sure this money is used wisely and not wasted. The legislation would establish a Special Inspector General to provide independent and objective audits and investigations relating to the federal programs for Hurricane Katrina recovery.

As Chairman of the Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee, I oversaw the successful creation of a Special Inspector General for Iraqi reconstruction funding. This position has uncovered millions of dollars in fraud and waste in Iraqi contracts. The bill I introduced dealing with Hurricane Katrina spending mirrors the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction.

Just like we did with Iraq Reconstruction, the Special Inspector General for Hurricane Katrina will help ensure that American taxpayer dollars are being put to good use.

HOUSE ACTIONS

Legislation passed in the House as of October 7, 2005

- ✓ H.R. 3669 – Increases the borrowing authority of the Federal Emergency Management Agency to \$2 billion to ensure prompt response to claim holders.
- ✓ H.R. 3668 (Student Grant Hurricane Disaster Relief Act) – Provides a waiver for students required to repay student grant aid because they were forced to withdraw from classes due to a natural disaster.
- ✓ H.R. 3672 (TANF Emergency Response and Recovery Act) – Provides all states immediate access to their next quarter's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant and immediately makes available \$4.2 billion in flexible funds to support those families with children affected by Hurricane Katrina.
- ✓ H.R. 3673 (Second Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act) – Provides \$50 billion for FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund, \$1.4 billion for the Dept. of Defense, and \$400 million for the Army Corps of Engineers to repair damaged infrastructure.
- ✓ H.R. 3650 (Federal Judiciary Emergency Special Sessions Act) – Authorizes federal courts to conduct special sessions outside their geographic boundaries if their normal operations were disrupted because of emergency conditions.
- ✓ H.R. 3169 (Pell Grant Hurricane & Disaster Relief Act) – Provides a waiver for students required to repay Pell Grants because they were forced to withdraw from classes because of a major hurricane or natural disaster.
- ✓ H.Res. 425 – Expresses the condolences of the Nation to the Victims of Hurricane Katrina. The House commends the resiliency and courage of the people of the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.
- ✓ H.R. 3645 (Emergency Supplemental Appropriations) – Provides \$10.5 billion for immediate needs in response to Hurricane Katrina.
- ✓ H.R. 3736 (Katrina Volunteer Protection Act) – Provides basic legal protections to those who help in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.
- ✓ H.Con.Res. 240 – Supporting the Goals and Ideals of a National Day of Prayer and Remembrance for the Victims of Hurricane Katrina and Encouraging all Americans to Observe the Day (September 14, 2005).
- ✓ H.Res. 437 – Establishes a select bipartisan committee to investigate the preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina. The select committee is comprised of 20 members appointed by the Speaker, nine of whom will be appointed after consultation with the Minority leader. The committee will conduct a full and complete investigation and study regarding the development, coordination, and execution by local, state, and federal authorities of emergency response plans and other activities in preparation for Hurricane Katrina.
- ✓ H.R. 3768 (Katrina Emergency Tax Relief Act) – Provides fast, targeted tax relief, giving those affected by Hurricane Katrina more flexibility and resources, encourages cash donations to help victims and will provide incentives for housing assistance.
- ✓ H.R. 889 (Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act) – Reauthorizes the Coast Guard in Fiscal Year 2006 and includes language to help the service deal with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Provides an additional \$60 million to reimburse the Coast Guard for the cost of rescuing approximately 6,500 people stranded by the hurricane.
- ✓ H.R. 3864 (Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Affected by Hurricanes Katrina or Rita) – Provides vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities affected by Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Rita.
- ✓ H.R. 3894 (Hurricane Katrina Emergency Housing Act) – Waives requirements under the section 8 (United States Housing Act of 1937) housing voucher and project-based assistance programs for those affected by the hurricanes.
- ✓ H.R. 3863 (Natural Disaster Student Aid Fairness Act) – Waives certain matching funds requirements with respect to campus-based student assistance programs under the Higher Education Act of 1965, for institutions of higher education that are located in areas affected by a Gulf hurricane disaster caused by Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Rita or have accepted for enrollment any students who were affected by the disaster.
- ✓ H.R. 3896 (Hurricane Katrina Emergency Relief CDBG Flexibility Act) – suspends the community development block grant public services cap for FY2005-FY 2008 for communities directly or indirectly affected by Hurricane Katrina.

UPDATE ON PRESCRIPTION DRUG COVERAGE

for Arizona Retirees



Important Phone Numbers:

Medicare: 1-800-MEDICARE

Social Security Administration: 1-800-772-1213

State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP):
1-800-432-4040

At the end of 2003, Congress enacted a new law to help pay for your medications through the Medicare program. You may have already started to see savings by signing up for a prescription drug discount card. While you can still sign up for and use the discount drug cards, the card will expire at the end of 2005, after which the new comprehensive Medicare prescription drug benefit takes its place.

This new benefit, which officially begins on January 1, 2006, is voluntary. If you are satisfied with your current coverage, you do not need to change anything. But, if you do not already have prescription drug coverage, or if you are looking for better coverage, the new benefit is worth considering. Everyone who is on Medicare is eligible for the benefit, regardless of income. Extra help will be available for those with limited incomes, and a choice of plans will be given so you can pick the one that best meets your specific health care needs.

It is estimated that more than 117,000 people in southeastern Arizona are Medicare beneficiaries, and they can benefit from this new prescription drug plan.

Medicare prescription drug coverage can help you by covering both brand name and generic prescription drugs at participating pharmacies close to where you live. I hope you will take a moment to read about the new benefit, talk it over with your family and physician, and consider how it could help you pay for your prescription drugs.

Important Dates for Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage

Summer 2005

Medicare will mail application to those who may qualify for extra help.

October 2005

Watch the mail for the Medicare & You handbook with instructions on how to join a plan.

November 15, 2005

First day you can join a plan.

January 1, 2006

Coverage begins for those who join by December 31, 2005

May 15, 2006

Last day to join a plan without paying a penalty.

HOW THE MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG PLAN *Works for You*

How To Enroll

Everyone in Medicare is eligible for the Medicare prescription drug benefit, although it is entirely voluntary. Enrollment in the benefit begins November 15, 2005. Those who sign up before December 31, 2005 will have coverage starting January 1, 2006. Open enrollment for coverage in 2006 continues through May 15, 2006. Each person in Medicare will have their choice of several Medicare prescription drug plans, and there is additional assistance for those on limited incomes. The Medicare prescription drug benefit covers brand name and generic drugs. Medicare beneficiaries can enroll online at www.medicare.gov and by phone (1-800-MEDICARE).

For Those Who Get Medicines Through Medicaid

If you are eligible for Medicare, but currently receive your prescription drugs through Medicaid, Medicare will provide you with your prescription drug benefit beginning in 2006. You will soon receive a notice from Medicare that you automatically qualify for assistance in paying for your medications. You will still need to choose and enroll in a drug plan. However, if you don't, Medicare will still enroll you in a plan automatically so that there are no gaps in your coverage. Medicare will let you know which plan you have been enrolled in by October 2005, and you can switch plans at any time.

For Those With Employer or Union Coverage

Medicare is working with employers and unions to help you keep the coverage you already have. You should contact your benefits administrator and physician to decide whether you should keep your current coverage or switch to a Medicare plan. Please remember that if you drop your employer or union coverage, your eligibility for your employer/union plan may be affected.

For Those in Managed Care

If you are currently in managed care and have drug coverage, you are free to keep it. If you do not have drug coverage, you can stay in your health plan and add a Medicare prescription drug plan.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

- In most plans, you will be responsible for paying the first \$250 in drug costs each year, called the deductible.
- The Medicare prescription drug benefit will pay for 75% of your drug costs up to \$2,250.
- After you pay \$3,600 in out-of-pocket costs, Medicare will pay for 95% of the rest of your prescription drug costs.
- This process starts over each year.

THOSE WITH LIMITED INCOMES

- If your annual income is below \$12,920 (\$17,321 for couples) you will have no deductible and no premium.
- If your income is below \$14,355 (\$19,245 for couples) you will benefit from reduced deductibles, premiums, and co-pays.

NEW PREVENTIVE SERVICES AVAILABLE

Medicare now covers preventive screenings. Every Medicare beneficiary can receive a free initial physical exam. In addition to already covering screenings for glaucoma, as well as breast, cervical, colorectal, and prostate cancers, Medicare now covers new cholesterol, blood lipid, diabetes, and osteoporosis screenings, as well as new disease management programs.

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On the Web:
www.house.gov/kolbe

Kolbe TV Show Debuts!

Check your local listings! Congressman Kolbe has launched an informative television show for people living in southeastern Arizona. “The Jim Kolbe Show: From Desert to the Dome” will premier in mid-October throughout Tucson and Cochise County. The 30 minute program will allow Congressman Kolbe the opportunity to discuss federal issues with those playing an important role in government.

The inaugural show sets a high standard. Congressman Kolbe was honored to have U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor join him for a discussion on growing up in Arizona on a ranch, the values she learned, and even some interesting information about her pet – a bobcat!



This is your show. If you have any suggestions for our name, or topics you would like to see covered, please go to the “contact me” link on www.house.gov/kolbe and email your ideas.



Congressman Kolbe discusses the recent Supreme Court nominations with Justice Sandra Day O’Connor.

UPDATE ON THE ECONOMY

The strong fundamentals of our economy will help as America recovers from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

While Jobs Have Been Lost Due To Hurricanes Katrina And Rita, The Overall Economy Remains Vibrant.

Prior to the hurricanes, the economy created over 2.2 million jobs in the last 12 months – and over 4.2 million since May 2003. With the help of this strong economy, the Gulf Coast states will rebound as the recovery continues.

While The Nation's Employment Has Been Impacted, The Economy Remains Strong.

One of the economy's strengths is a resiliency built on sound economic policies. The economy's resiliency has been tested through the Stock Market bubble, a recession, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and corporate scandals. The economy recovered with strength. The hurricanes will have a short-term national impact, and private economic forecasts predict sustained growth in the face of these new challenges.

GDP Growth Is Solid. Recently released Commerce Department figures show that the U.S. economy grew at a solid 3.3 percent annual rate in the second quarter, the ninth straight quarter in which GDP increased at a rate above 3 percent. This growth reflects strong increases in exports, equipment, housing, and consumer spending.

Manufacturing Production Is Expanding. The Institute for Supply Management (ISM), a private research group, reports manufacturing output was growing for the 28th consecutive month in September. The ISM's manufacturing index reading of 59.4 is considerably stronger than market expectations and is the highest since August 2004. In August, new orders for manufacturers' durable goods rose a strong 3.4 percent as overall orders to factories increased.

Construction Spending Remains Strong. According to Commerce Department figures, construction spending rose 0.4 percent to a record high in August of \$1.11 trillion. This is the biggest increase in three months.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

The following legislation passed between July 25-October 7.

Department of Justice Appropriations Authorization Act

On Sept. 28, the House approved legislation authorizing appropriations for FY2006-FY2009 to carry out the activities of the Department of Justice. The bill will help ensure DHS has the resources and authority necessary to prevent, prepare, respond and recover from terrorist attacks. My amendment to reauthorize and increase SCAAP funding to reimburse states and localities for detaining criminal undocumented aliens passed without objection.

H.Con.Res. 245

On Sept. 29, the House passed a resolution expressing the sense of Congress that the U.S. Supreme Court should quickly find the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in schools to be consistent with the Constitution. Rep. Kolbe was a co-sponsor of this legislation.

Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance Enhancement Act

On July 26, the House passed legislation making permanent a temporary increase to the maximum life insurance payout for servicemembers killed in the line of duty to \$400,000, from its previous level of \$250,000. The President signed the bill into law on September 30.



Children's Safety Act

On Sept. 14, the House passed legislation to increase the safety and security of children in their homes, in their yards, and in their neighborhoods. The bill enhances the safety of children from convicted sex offenders through coordinated state sex offender registration and notification programs. For the first time, the sex offender law will cover "federally recognized tribal lands."

Dominican Republic-Central American Free Trade Agreement

On July 28, the House passed a bill that approves the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA), entered into with the governments of the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. The President signed the bill into law on August 2.

Gasoline for America's Security Act

On October 7, the House passed H.R. 3893, a bill which encourages the siting of new refineries by giving states the opportunity to use reformed refinery siting procedures. The bill also establishes a program to encourage the use of carpooling and requires the Federal Trade Commission to study nationwide gasoline prices in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, including any evidence of price gouging.

New VA Survivor Benefits Website



The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has created a new Internet Website for the surviving spouses and dependents of military personnel who died on active duty and for the survivors and dependents of veterans who died after leaving the military. The website is organized into two broad categories – death in service and death after service. It provides visitors with information about a wide range of benefits for the surviving spouse, dependent children, and dependent parents of deceased veterans and active-duty personnel. The site also has information from -- and links to -- other federal agencies and organizations that offer benefits and services to survivors and dependents. The new website can be found at <http://www.vba.va.gov/survivors> or by clicking the "Survivors Benefits" button on the left panel of <http://www.vba.va.gov>. For more information on these and other benefits visit <http://www.military.com/benefits>.

From Jim's Mailbag

Dear Congressman Kolbe,

I urge you to support increased education benefits for members of our armed forces, specifically with increased funding for the Montgomery GI Bill. I also urge you to co-sponsor the Resume Education After Defense Service Act.

--Tucson, AZ

Thank you for contacting me regarding Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) education benefits for members of the Selected Reserves. I appreciate hearing from you.

I have consistently advocated improvements in benefits for our military and those who have worn the uniform in defense of our nation. I believe education benefits are one of the most important incentives the United States government offers those who volunteer to serve in our nation's armed forces. Just as the original GI Bill provided a college education to millions of World War II veterans, today's MGIB offers motivated young Americans an opportunity to serve their country and earn money toward a college degree. Over the years Congress has continually worked to improve the MGIB, which provides up to \$28,800 toward continuing education for active duty veterans.

The MGIB historically has been broken into two segments: the Montgomery GI Bill for active duty and the Montgomery GI Bill – Selected Reserve, for the reserve component (National Guard and Reserves). Currently, members participating in the active duty MGIB receive \$800 or \$985 per month for full-time educational training, depending on their length of service. But reserve component members receive only \$282 per month for full-time educational training. When Congress passed the original legislation, it did not envision that Reservists and Guardsmen would be called up to active duty for extended periods of time as they have been in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005 (Public Law 108-375) created a new education benefit for reservists. The new benefit, Chapter 1607, makes certain individuals who were activated after September 11, 2001 either eligible for education benefits or eligible for increased benefits. I voted in favor of this act, which President Bush signed into law on October 28, 2004.

The Department of Defense (DoD), Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are working on an implementation plan for this new benefit. You can find more information on the VA web site at <http://www.gibill.va.gov/>.

You will be pleased to know that I am a cosponsor of the Resume Education After Defense Service (READS) Act of 2005 (HR 772). If enacted, the READS Act would allow reserve component members serving two years aggregate, as opposed to two years continuous, on active duty over a five year period to qualify for the benefit. The READS Act also makes this provision retroactive to September 11, 2001.

As the number of veterans serving in Congress declines, my own commitment to our veterans, both as a Congressman and as a veteran, grows stronger. I will continue to support our armed forces and look for ways to assure all veterans receive the benefits they have earned.

Sincerely,



If you have a question or comment, log onto www.house.gov/kolbe.
Click on the "Contact Jim" link and simply fill out the form with your comments!